

**Statement of Monty Huggins before the House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Health Subcommittee Hearing on “Current Issues Related to Medical Liability Reform”  
February 10, 2005, 1 p.m.**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. My name is Monty Huggins and I'm from Knoxville, Tennessee. I was born and raised in the Florida Panhandle. I'm a life-long, active Republican, having believed in the platform we have stood for, for many years, that is, until now. I'm here today because I'm concerned that Congress is trying to take away the rights of people like me. You see my wife Janet suffered a sudden heart attack and passed away on September 25, 2004. She had been taking Vioxx for about one month prior to her death and she was only 39 years old.

She was in great shape and had no history of heart problems. She didn't smoke and she wasn't overweight in the slightest. She was proscribed Vioxx by her doctors because she had an early onset of rheumatoid arthritis and had been taking the drug for one month, right up until her death.

Janet was very involved in her work. She was project scheduler on large contracting projects like the Cleveland Brown Stadium and a \$350 million project with the Department of Energy. She enjoyed her job very much and took pride in the projects that she worked on.

Personally, Janet loved hiking, cooking and doing other family activities. Anything she could do to spend more time with me and our son was always her top priority. Janet also had a very close relationship with God and was involved in a variety of church activities and projects for the needy. We originally met through a church ministry and had just celebrated our one-year anniversary in Gatlinburg the weekend before she died.

My wife was an amazing human being and a wonderful mother to her 9-year-old son. We both miss her very much. Her death has impacted our lives in so many ways. Elijah, her son, will grow up without the love, tenderness, and advice of his mom. He will not get to enjoy the pleasures and benefits of having her there for his graduations, marriage and grandkids. The morning I was getting ready for her funeral is the morning they pulled Vioxx from the market. This was medicine that our doctor gave her to make her feel better. Medicine that was supposed to heal her. If they had pulled this deadly drug from the market even six to eight weeks earlier, my wife would still be alive today.

The proposed medical malpractice bill supported by the President will protect the makers of drugs like Vioxx. Why do we want to protect companies that may have knowingly killed people? Especially at a time when we know that our own government is doing a lousy job of protecting us from dangerous drugs.

When I heard about that guy from the Food and Drug Administration talking to the Senate it made me extremely angry. The way I understand it he's one of the top safety officials who approves drugs for the government. Here's one of the top safety guys telling the Senate that he and everyone else at the FDA can't do one thing to protect the American people from medicines that can kill you.

Our own government can't protect us and now they want to give companies like Merck a free ride and protect them from accountability? People need to know about this. Because my wife is not the only one who has died from Vioxx – it could have potentially killed thousands of others too.

I am not here before you just for me. I am here representing the tens of thousands that have been affected by this drug and more importantly to help make sure that we don't have

another Vioxx. A defective drug does not discriminate. This affects everyone in this room. We all take prescription drugs for various ailments and over the last several years we have seen the failure of the FDA to protect us. There must be deterrents to make sure that pharmaceutical companies do not knowingly put defective drugs on the market all in the name of profits.

This just isn't right. We depend on our government to protect us from things like this. And now that they can't do anything to get dangerous medicines off the market, it's just plain wrong to give the big drug companies this kind of legal protection.

These pharmaceutical companies should be held accountable if their drug caused my wife's death and the deaths of others and not be allowed to escape responsibility. This proposed bill would prohibit anyone from punishing drug companies for bad conduct.

As far as I'm concerned Merck took my wife away from me. They should be punished – not let off the hook.

Thank you for allowing me to be here today.